

ACCG Meeting Communiqué and Statement of Key Priorities

23 - 24 May 2017
Hobart, Tasmania

The Australian Children's Commissioners and Guardians (ACCG) comprises national, state and territory children and young people commissioners, guardians and advocates.

The ACCG aims to promote and protect the safety, wellbeing and rights of children and young people in Australia. The ACCG strives to ensure that the best interests of children and young people are considered in public policy and program development across Australia. The ACCG:

- promotes the rights of children and young people, including their right to participate in decisions relating to them, as articulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- ensures the best interests of children are considered in the development of policies and programs;
- gives voice to the views of, and encourages direct consultation with, children and young people on matters that affect them; and
- encourages systemic improvement, informed by evidence-based research, in areas that impact on the rights, interests and wellbeing of children and young people.

The ACCG met in Hobart, Tasmania on 23 and 24 May 2017. Members warmly welcomed the attendance of the New Zealand Children's Commissioner who presented on culturally significant approaches to youth justice in New Zealand.

Members of the ACCG Officers Network joined the meeting with ACCG members on day two and met separately following the meeting to progress actions from the ACCG.

Key priorities for the ACCG

Promoting children and young people's engagement and participation

Members are committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are actively sought and taken into account on issues of personal, local and national significance.

Achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people

Members agreed that the significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care, youth justice and child protection systems is a priority concern across all jurisdictions. There is a need to prioritise the rights, wellbeing, participation and connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people through greater investment in tackling systemic discrimination and adapting systems and services to improve their cultural sensitivity and competency. Actions need to take account of the targets already articulated through *Closing the Gap*, and the upcoming 20th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report, and be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Upholding the rights of children and young people in youth justice detention

Members highlighted serious concerns about the treatment of children and young people in youth justice detention and the extent to which their rights are recognised **as equally important as** those not held in detention and upheld accordingly. Youth justice detention must be a measure of last resort; where detention does occur, it should be rehabilitative and developmentally appropriate.

Improving the safety of children and young people in organisations

Members discussed the ongoing need to promote and encourage organisations across all sectors to develop a culture of child safe practice. Members are working in their own jurisdictions to support organisations to create and maintain safe environments for children and young people and are also working with the Australian Human Rights Commission as it develops a *National Statement of Principles for Child Safe Organisations* under the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*.

Ending violence against children and young people

Children and young people have a right to live free from all forms of violence and ending all violence against children and young people is a priority. Members discussed the fact that children are often silent and invisible victims, in particular in the context of family violence. Children and young people's experiences of violence are often very different from those of adults and therefore require a distinct and individualised response.

Promoting children and young people's safety and wellbeing

Members discussed and agreed on the importance of evidence-based decision-making frameworks for child protection practice. Members agreed that all services provided to children and young people should be trauma-informed and have a therapeutic focus, recognising that the individual needs of each child and young person should have precedence in making decisions about their care and support.

The next meeting of the ACCG will be held in Melbourne in November 2017.

